

Short Paper #1: Ethics of “Taste, Ties, and Time”

In this week’s readings, you read about a controversial research project which collected data from Facebook profiles of all members of the Class of 2009 at a “diverse private college in the Northeastern U.S.” As you are now well aware, there has been a significant ethical debate over the propriety of this project and whether researchers should use this dataset.

In a short paper (1000-1200 words), assess this project’s adherence to Salganik’s four principles of ethical research. As a reminder, the four principles are:

1. Respect for persons
2. Beneficence
3. Justice
4. Respect for law and public interest

In addition, explain whether or not you would use this data for your own research (if made available) and why.

I am not asking you to summarize the project or its related publications. Rather, I’m asking you to engage the material and conduct your own independent analysis. Cite outside papers and articles as necessary. You are of course free to discuss specific components of the data or aspects of the project that you feel are relevant to your arguments, but the paper should not read as an extended summary of the project.

You will probably find it helpful to read some of the original publications based on this dataset, as well as scholarly responses. Here is a selection of relevant papers (this is only a partial list - you may find more if you conduct your own search):

- Lewis, K., Kaufman, J., Gonzalez, M., Wimmer, A., & Christakis, N. (2008). Tastes, ties, and time: A new social network dataset using Facebook.com. *Social networks*, 30(4), 330-342.
- Wimmer, A., & Lewis, K. (2010). Beyond and below racial homophily: Erg models of a friendship network documented on facebook. *American Journal of Sociology*, 116(2), 583-642.
- Lewis, K., Gonzalez, M., & Kaufman, J. (2012). Social selection and peer influence in an online social network. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 109(1), 68-72.
- Zimmer, M. (2010). “But the data is already public”: on the ethics of research in Facebook. *Ethics and information technology*, 12(4), 313-325.

Submitting your assignment

All assignments for this course should be submitted via GitHub pull request. The basic workflow for homework should be:

1. Fork the class repository
2. Clone the repository to your computer
3. Modify the files and commit changes to complete your paper/problem set.
4. Push the changes up to your forked repository on GitHub.
5. Create a pull request on the original repository to turn in the assignment.
Make sure to include your name in the pull request.

Once you have forked the repository the first time, you do not need to make a new fork for each assignment. Rather, sync your fork with the upstream repository. This will merge updates to the course repository with your fork, including additional demonstration files and new assignments as they are created.

Dr. Evans has written a guide to using GitHub and this specific workflow you may find useful.

Paper format

You may write your paper in whatever format you wish (e.g. Word document, PDF, Markdown). As long as we can read it, we will review and grade it. *Please don't make it difficult for us to do that.* Save your paper in the same directory as the assignment instructions.

Submission deadline

Submit your paper before class on Monday, October 10th (11:30 am).